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Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission LPRAC
Public Hearing on Bilingual Education in Connecticut
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Good afternoon,

My name is Andrea Handler-Ruiz. I teach science at Windham High School in Willimantic and hold a graduate degree in Curriculum and Instruction in Bilingual Education. I hope that my words, together with other voices, can be heard as a strong and solid message which cannot, and should not, continue to be minimized or undermined.

I came to Connecticut in 2005 to expressly work in a Bilingual high school science classroom. As of two years ago, I no longer teach in this educational setting. Due to the many changes that have affected my district, the transitional bilingual program at the High School was dissolved. The dedicated team of teachers that were part of it dispersed. Before this happened though, our students learned in two languages and they were bilingual thinkers in the making. We worked to improve our bilingual model with one big goal: we wanted our students to trust their abilities to succeed academically.

Our Latino English Language Learners (L-ELLs) were challenged to advance to honors and AP classes. During the last two years of the bilingual program we had 8 students enrolled in two college prep science classes, three in honors and one in an AP class. Many of these students successfully continued on to college as first generation university students. We were ecstatic. This was a triumph for our program and it was a direct result of the collective effort and support of teachers, counselors, and administrators. Our bilingual students became a recognized group and a strong small community of learners. They had a self-standing identity and a voice of their own, all while learning to navigate the new social-ethnic parameters of their lives. They began to be heard as a collective. They began to excel as individuals.